



# Journal of Religion & Film

Volume 15

Issue 1 April 2011

Article 16

6-2-2016

## “What Kind of Magic is This? How Come I Can’t Help Adore You?”: Lars von Trier’s *Dancer in the Dark* as a Religious Film

Gilbert Yeoh

National University of Singapore, [ellyeohg@nus.edu.sg](mailto:ellyeohg@nus.edu.sg)

### Recommended Citation

Yeoh, Gilbert (2016) ““What Kind of Magic is This? How Come I Can’t Help Adore You?”: Lars von Trier’s *Dancer in the Dark* as a Religious Film,” *Journal of Religion & Film*: Vol. 15 : Iss. 1 , Article 16.  
Available at: <https://digitalcommons.unomaha.edu/jrf/vol15/iss1/16>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by DigitalCommons@UNO. It has been accepted for inclusion in Journal of Religion & Film by an authorized editor of DigitalCommons@UNO. For more information, please contact [unodigitalcommons@unomaha.edu](mailto:unodigitalcommons@unomaha.edu).

UNIVERSITY OF  
**Nebraska**  
Omaha

---

# “What Kind of Magic is This? How Come I Can’t Help Adore You?”: Lars von Trier’s *Dancer in the Dark* as a Religious Film

## **Abstract**

This article argues that, while it is not apparent, Lars von Trier’s musical *Dancer in the Dark* (2000) has a crucial religious dimension. Specifically, von Trier’s film enacts a sustained allegory of Christian redemption and further uses the genre of the musical to evoke von Trier’s vision of Christian religiosity. This article also discusses the larger implications of viewing *Dancer* as a religious film. Doing so enables us to see how *Dancer* is a companion piece to von Trier’s explicitly religious *Breaking the Waves* (1996). It also enables us to strengthen our view of von Trier as a religious filmmaker and to place him within the tradition of European religious filmmakers like Carl Theodor Dreyer (his fellow countryman), Robert Bresson and Ingmar Bergman, even as we observe how he remakes the European religious film by approaching it with playfulness and provocativeness.

## **Author Notes**

This article argues that, while it is not apparent, Lars von Trier’s musical *Dancer in the Dark* (2000) has a crucial religious dimension. Specifically, von Trier’s film enacts a sustained allegory of Christian redemption and further uses the genre of the musical to evoke von Trier’s vision of Christian religiosity. This article also discusses the larger implications of viewing *Dancer* as a religious film. Doing so enables us to see how *Dancer* is a companion piece to von Trier’s explicitly religious *Breaking the Waves* (1996). It also enables us to strengthen our view of von Trier as a religious filmmaker and to place him within the tradition of European religious filmmakers like Carl Theodor Dreyer (his fellow countryman), Robert Bresson and Ingmar Bergman, even as we observe how he remakes the European religious film by approaching it with playfulness and provocativeness.

While "religion and film" studies is an intimidatingly broad field, there is no doubt that an important site within it is constituted by European cinema given the numerous prominent religiously- or spiritually-oriented films made by European masters like Carl Theodor Dreyer, Robert Bresson, Ingmar Bergman and Andrei Tarkovsky.<sup>1</sup> The oeuvres of these European directors have been a longstanding site for critical discussions on cinema's relationship to religion or spirituality;<sup>2</sup> indeed, one specific valuable insight gleaned from these directors is how their films engage with the sacred dimension not just at the narrative level but through the form of film itself. In this article, I aim to situate the contemporary Danish director Lars von Trier within this tradition of religious film by the European masters, specifically through a close reading of his film *Dancer in the Dark* (2000). I will show that *Dancer* in fact enacts a very specific allegory of Christian redemption and, further, constitutes von Trier's attempt to evoke a vision of Christian religiosity. That *Dancer* has substantial association with Christianity is not apparent since the main genres that define it are the musical and the melodrama. Nowhere in von Trier's film are religious elements ever explicitly broached and, unsurprisingly, critics have not viewed it as a religious film.<sup>3</sup> My foregrounding of *Dancer*'s Christian dimension will reinforce the view of von Trier as a religious filmmaker and, specifically, how he is working within the tradition of religiously-oriented film by European directors. Further, we will see how von

Trier, in his characteristic stance as a controversial creative maverick, is playfully and provocatively reconfiguring the European religious film.

That von Trier is a religiously-oriented filmmaker is evident from both biographical information and his oeuvre. We know that von Trier converted to Catholicism in the 1990s and, in an interview, he states: "[T]hat's the faith I practise. I pray several times a day."<sup>4</sup> In her book on von Trier, Caroline Bainbridge makes reference to "the personal tussle with religion that seems to lie at the heart of much of von Trier's life and work."<sup>5</sup> While not immediately apparent, many of von Trier's films are religiously-oriented and specifically grounded within a Christian framework. Thus far, his most explicitly religious film is *Breaking the Waves* (1996), which, even though characterized by modernist ambivalence, is ultimately resoundingly affirmative of Christian belief. One, for instance, observes the unequivocal foregrounding of miracles in this film as well as its unambiguous affirmation of the Christian afterlife. Indeed, in my attempt to crystallize *Dancer's* religious dimension, I will at times turn to the explicitly religious *Breaking the Waves* as a work that is a parallel film to *Dancer*. It is not hard to see how many of von Trier's other films also have a significant religious dimension. For example, the first two films in von Trier's USA trilogy, *Dogville* (2003) and *Manderlay* (2005), though not explicitly religious, are both clearly religious allegories. *Dogville* considers the hypothetical scenario of Christ, allegorically represented by

the film's suitably-named protagonist, Grace, experiencing a change of mind and withdrawing his salvation from the world, forsaking it to its condemnation by the Law. The film thus playfully ends with the dog, Moses, the sole surviving being following the Dogville community's destruction. Moses is, of course, suggestive of the Mosaic Law, this being the condition that exists following the withdrawal of grace. *Manderlay* continues to foreground the predominance of the Law. It explores how, despite the novel, liberating presence of grace--also embodied in the film by the character Grace—human beings continue to prefer their former conditions of enslavement, whether by the Law or by sin. The title of von Trier's most recent film, *Antichrist* (2009), again invokes the Christian paradigm and, even while this film may be obscure, it is at the very least a murky meditation on evil in the world. In relation to the Dogme 95 movement partly founded by von Trier, Bainbridge observes how "[t]he playful and highly ironic discursive style of the Dogme 95 manifesto and the 'Vow of Chastity'" uses a "self-conscious rhetoric of asceticism and faux-religion," underscoring how "[this] founding documentation of the movement recalls a great deal of von Trier's personal investment in religious belief."<sup>6</sup>

To perceive von Trier as a religious filmmaker is to see how he is playfully and provocatively reconfiguring the European religious film. Thus, as we shall see, *Dancer* provocatively recasts the religious film into a musical, invoking the joyous

utopianism of the musical to manifest Christian religiosity. In the Christian allegories of *Dogville* and *Manderlay*, God the Father is amusingly figured in the form of the boss of a gang of thugs, while Christ is represented by his beautiful and at times rebellious daughter. Indeed, if Bergman raises religious questions in full earnestness and solemnity, von Trier approaches the subject of religion with his characteristic playfulness, provocativeness and tongue-in-cheek levity. To view von Trier as working within the tradition of European religious film allows us yet to consolidate another neat affiliation, namely that between him and his fellow countryman, Dreyer. Religion may indeed be one of the most important links between von Trier and Dreyer, and here one may discern the latter-day maverick to be following the master's concern with religious film, to the point of also positioning female heroines centrally within religious dramas.<sup>7</sup>

*Dancer's* Christian allegory is present in the film's main plot which centers on Selma, a Czechoslovakian immigrant in America, and her son. Let me at this point give a quick summary of the film's plot so that the allegorical dimension can be discussed. Early in the film, we learn that Selma is afflicted by a disease that will soon render her blind. This is a disease that runs in her family line and indeed it will soon also be transmitted to her twelve-year old son, Gene. Selma grows increasingly blind in the course of the film, and she knows that Gene will soon be similarly afflicted. Selma responds to this impending disaster by single-mindedly

seeking to prevent Gene's blindness. Specifically, she works hard at both her day job at a production facility and by taking on odd jobs in order to save up a sum for an eye operation for Gene. Selma keeps her situation secret and, to those around her, she is saving money for her father back home in Czechoslovakia. Selma does, however, share her secret with her landlord and neighbor Bill Huston, after he unburdens to her his own desperate situation of being in deep financial trouble, and of the equally-worrying pressure on him to keep up the appearance of being materially well-off before his wife, Linda. Selma and Bill share their secrets with each other and both pledge not to disclose each other's secret. Eventually, however, the increasingly desperate Bill betrays Selma by stealing her money for Gene's operation and when Selma confronts him to recover her money, he frames her as attempting to steal his money instead. In a scene that involves a scuffle between Bill and Selma, Selma accidentally shoots Bill with his gun, and goes on to kill him following his desperate appeal to her to do so so as to put him out of his misery. Selma is arrested for Bill's murder and, even at her trial, she remains silent about Bill's financial plight, sticking to her earlier pledge. The upshot is that Selma does not defend herself at the trial and is eventually sent to the gallows as a thief, murderer and betrayer of the Hustons' hospitality (as charitable landlords to a poor immigrant). During her incarceration, the possibility of a re-trial opens up. But because the re-trial involves paying the lawyer with the money for Gene's

operation, Selma refuses and allows the death sentence to take its course. In a provocative final scene, Selma is hanged—she falls dramatic through the trapdoor.

One need not be the most astute of critics to discern in this plot outline von Trier's Christian allegory of redemption with Selma as a Christ-figure whose sacrificial death enables Gene to retain his vision. Von Trier uses the well-worn Christian trope of sight and vision—Selma dies so that her son can "see," indeed might achieve new vision. As Selma imagines the scenario, when Gene presents himself before the doctors for the operation, he will also claim a new identity. Selma expresses it as follows: "He will come, and he will say that his name is Novy. And then you will know that he has been paid for." Gene's operation involves re-naming himself; specifically, he will call himself Novy, affiliating himself with Oldrich Novy, a Czech actor remembered by Selma who was prominent in Czech musicals. Gene's gift of sight, mediated by Selma's sacrificial death, is further associated with a new affiliation with a figure from a musical. The significance of Gene's redefinition will be discussed later. At a broader level, Selma's sacrificial death not only saves Gene's vision but in fact brings an end to a defective condition that has been transmitted through the generations. Selma calls her condition a "family thing" and the dimension of generational transmission is further evoked by the name "Gene" which connotes biological transmission. This generationally-transmitted defective condition is, of course, von Trier's metaphor for Christian sin



and, within its allegorical logic, *Dancer* imagines the redemption of this defective generational condition through Selma's sacrificial death.

*Dancer* thus presents us not just with a loose Christian allegory but one that is specific and sustained. Besides the tropes of sight and blindness, the other clear indicator of the film's Christian allegory lies in the film's characterization of Selma as a Christ-figure.<sup>8</sup> That Selma is a Christ-figure is perhaps most obvious in how her hanging parallels Christ's crucifixion. Indeed, one might ask how many works with Christ-figures actually enact the parallel with Christ in terms of His crucifixion. Von Trier's dramatic hanging scene, in which the viewer follows a prone Selma strapped down to a wooden board who is then sent plunging to her death through a trapdoor, certainly evokes the Christian crucifixion along with all its anguish and emotional turbulence. Selma also parallels Christ in her characterization as one who is innocent and good-hearted to an extreme and yet who is falsely accused. The false accusations malign Selma as a moral monstrosity—as a conscienceless thief, murderer, seducer and betrayer who kills Bill in the most heinous fashion in inflicting 34 wounds on him. Like Christ, Selma, out of her pledge to Bill, remains silent before the false accusations, neither defending herself nor retaliating against them (Matt 27: 14). Selma is of course like Christ in being utterly innocent of the charges leveled at her; she in fact parallels Christ in being innocent and pure in intentions. Despite the false charges she faces,

she keeps her pledge not to reveal Bill's secret. Even her act of killing Bill is (arguably) an act of mercy and goodness towards him—an act that responds to his appeal to her to put him out of his misery. Elsewhere in the film, one will also detect specific references to Selma as a Christ-figure. The scene where Samuel first kisses Selma and then turns her in to the police is of course a reference to Judas' betrayal of Christ (Matt 26:49).

That *Dancer's* Christian allegory is sustained can be seen in how other aspects of the film are part of it. I would now like to focus on Selma's musical world and the film's use of the musical genre as crucial aspects of the film's Christian allegory. Selma remarks that the world of the musical is one in which "nothing dreadful ever happens" and most viewers would readily apprehend Selma's musical world as the clichéd perfect world that she escapes to when faced with her quotidian drudgery and her deteriorating situation. I would nevertheless like to stress that beyond being a utopian fantasy world, there are in fact Christian elements allegorically attached to Selma's musical world. To begin, while Selma does not have a father in the actual world—she tells Bill, "I've never had a father"—she creates an imaginary father in her musicals using the figure of Oldrich Novy, the actor prominent in Czech musicals. While in this world she is fatherless, in her musical world she is able to appeal to a father-figure. This duality is demonstrably clear in how the film shows that while the actual Oldrich Novy categorically denies

any affiliation with Selma—"I do not know her," he says—his screen persona, as the leading man in Selma's imagined musical, is a figure who warmly embraces her. Indeed, in Selma's imagined musical world, an intense rapturous relationship of love and adoration exists between Selma and Novy; the film's fatherless protagonist finds an ecstatic relationship with an imaginary father-figure in the musical world. This rapturous state is expressed in the musical number that breaks out in the court scene. On Selma's part, we see first her rapturous awe of musicals and the virtually mystical world they represent: "Why do I love it so much? What kind of magic is this?" Selma later varies this line with regard to Novy where she expresses her rapturous, even mystified adoration of her musical world's imagined father-figure: "Why do I love you so much? What kind of magic is this? How come I can't help adore you?" The terms of the relation here are powerful, connoting bliss and rapture, indeed Selma's mystified enthrallment to this imagined father-figure. Selma's rapturous adoration of Novy is in turn reciprocated by his equally joyous assurance of his never-ending, eternal support for her, sung in his refrain "I'll always be there to catch you."<sup>9</sup>

I am, of course, implying that we view this scene through the terms of the film's Christian allegory. Allegorically, the number depicts a rapturous colloquy between the film's protagonist and Christian divinity. We have, on the one hand, the protagonist's rapturous awe and adoration of a Christian God. We have, on the

other hand, the fatherly God-figure who expresses eternal support for the character. (Novy's refrain, for example, echoes Hebrews 13:5: "Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you.") The number is suitably marked by joyousness, rapture and even mystification, befitting its Christian allegorical dimension. At this point, it becomes clear that Selma's musical world can be approached in terms of the film's Christian allegory; specifically, it refers not just to a general utopian world but allegorically signifies a world of Christian divinity. Such a view is important in enabling a fuller grasp of the film's Christian allegory. For example, it allows us to perceive the redemption of Gene's vision as specifically cast in Christian terms. As indicated earlier, Gene's operation is accompanied by how he will also take on the name Novy--a redefinition of identity that links him to a "father" in the musical world. The correction of Gene's vision is thus not a mere physical process but one that links him to the otherworldly musical world; allegorically, it links him to a world of Christian divinity and in fact to an all-loving father-figure. If Selma dies so that Gene may see, he sees within the expanded terms of Christian spiritual sight.

More importantly, an awareness of the musical world as allegorically signifying Christian divinity enables us to see how the film's Christian allegory pointedly poses the question of faith. Novy's refrain that "[he] will always be there to catch [Selma]"—a line sung within the musical world—becomes the key line in the film's final scene as Selma falls through the trapdoor. Indeed, the key question

being asked at this point in the film's final moment is whether there is someone there to catch Selma. At one level, the question can be asked in an awkward, almost laughable way: Can Selma's musical fantasy save her? Is there always someone there, as her flimsy musicals lead her to believe, to catch her? The answer is, of course, negative and, if anything, the viewer might leave the film's climactic scene with a sense of minor irony. Nevertheless, for the viewer who has followed the film's Christian allegory and, specifically, how the film's musical world is von Trier's allegory for the realm of Christian divinity, he will detect that what von Trier is doing in the final scene of the protagonist's hanging is in fact posing the specific question of Christian faith—Is there indeed someone there—a loving, reassuring father-figure—to catch Selma as she falls? Is there indeed always someone there to catch her? Filmmakers like Bergman have posed questions about faith and the existence of God in earnest despairing fashion.<sup>10</sup> Von Trier revisits these ideas and, in his characteristic provocative manner, recasts them within the unlikely tropes of the musical. *Dancer*'s closing scene in fact parallels the final scene of *Breaking the Waves* whose religious significance is explicit. In this earlier film, there is little doubt that the death of its protagonist Bess is followed by her ascension to heaven and her joyous afterlife in a Christian stratosphere. The purpose of its final scene is in fact to resoundingly affirm the existence of the Christian God Bess believes in.<sup>11</sup> *Dancer*'s final scene follows in this religious stance in how it allegorically poses the question of faith, asking if its protagonist's plunge to death marks a finality or

if indeed there is someone there to catch her as she falls. Indeed, if *Breaking the Waves* is resoundingly affirmative of Christian faith, *Dancer* engages with the subject of Christian belief by posing it as an open-ended question, even as it gestures towards answering it in the affirmative.

That *Dancer* gestures towards an answer in the affirmative is suggested by the film's motif of the "next-to-last song" which, in emphasizing the idea of the penultimate song, is used to imply a musical that never ends. The motif first appears in the scene where Selma and Bill share secrets with each other. Here Selma shares with Bill her love of musicals, and how she "cheats" the musical so that it never ends. She says:

But isn't that annoying when they do the last song in the films, though? ... Because you just know when it goes really big, and the camera goes like, out of the roof, and you just know it's gonna end. I hate that. ... I used to cheat on that when I was a little girl back in Czechoslovakia. I would leave the cinema just after the next-to-last song, and the film would go on forever.

The motif of the next-to-last song is directly invoked at Selma's final number which she sings as she stands on the trapdoor with the noose round her neck. She sings that what she is singing is not the last song but the next-to-last song, implying that her song and musical will continue after her death. Selma's subsequent fall through the trapdoor therefore poses the following question: Is there evidence that her song continues after her fall, i.e. what evidence do we have that her recent song was not

the last song but the next--to-last song? In terms of the Christian allegory, what evidence is there that, though we do not see it, someone indeed catches Selma as she falls? Echoing Selma's words in the earlier scene, the camera does indeed go out of the roof in a strong formal upward vertical movement even as the film blanks out what lies "beyond" the roof, i.e. what lies beyond remains unknown to us. Here we still encounter the film's central thrust of posing the question of faith in terms of a tantalizingly openness rather than in affirming it. But the film does gesture towards an affirmative answer for this question in the non-diegetic text that it superimposes on the final shot, where Selma's faith that her song does not end is given support. The non-diegetic text reads: "They say it's the last song/They don't know us, you see/It's only the last song/If we let it be." It may not be clear who the "us" is and, taking it to refer to the audience, we can propose that the film at this point is suggesting a compact with its audience—especially those in the know—to affirm that Selma's faith in her unending song holds true. As she did when she was a girl, Selma has "cheated" the musical here. Positioned always at the next-to-last song, Selma's personal musical goes on forever even as *Dancer* becomes a musical that goes on forever, both of which become metaphors for the transcendent Christian realm. To perceive *Dancer's* positing of such a realm is to see how it nicely runs parallels to *Breaking the Waves* and this latter film's resounding affirmation of a joyous Christian afterlife. Perhaps another indication of the film's affirmation of Selma's position is in how it switches to a new style in the final shot.

While all the previous moving shots in the film are handheld and hence jerky, in this final shot, we have a moving shot that is defined by a very formal camera movement—a vertical crane shot. The switch to a new style indicates a new dimension.

I have discussed how *Dancer* is a religious film that operates through allegory. To detect its religious dimension, it is necessary to discern its allegorical dimension. Nevertheless, I would now like to state that *Dancer's* religious dimension actually extends beyond its allegorical mode to be, further, vitally present in its use of the musical genre. "Sing to the Lord a new song; sing to the Lord, all the earth," so begins Psalm 96 and, in the Biblical Psalms, we frequently see expressed that aspect of Christianity that envisions an entire earth joyously suffused with exuberant song and music in its apprehension of divinity. In *Dancer*, von Trier uses the musical genre not just as a narrative figure for a divine realm but draws on its ecstatically sensuous and utopian dimensions to figure Christian divinity concretely and expressively. As Jane Feuer observes, "[m]usicals are unparalleled in presenting a vision of human liberation that is profoundly aesthetic."<sup>12</sup> By using the musical, von Trier is able to sensuously exemplify Christian divinity and the utopian ecstasy one ought to associate with it, in a manner that cannot be matched by other representation modes. Echoing Dreyer, von Trier finds his own way of using the film medium to represent the divine.<sup>13</sup>



Von Trier's association of music and divinity occurs not just in *Dancer* but, once again, has been previewed in *Breaking the Waves*. Viewers of this latter film would recall how its narrative is punctuated by relatively extended interludes comprising panoramic shots of the Scottish landscape. Von Trier explains these panoramic shots as "God's-eye-view of the landscape in which the story is unfolding, as if he were watching over the characters."<sup>14</sup> These divine panoramic views are further suffused with the rock music of the 70s, playfully associating the divine with the easy idioms of popular music. *Dancer* intensifies this association of divinity with music in how it links divinity with an entire genre, indeed drawing on the unparalleled rapture and utopia of this genre to express, for von Trier, the inevitable ecstasy of encountering the Christian divine.

---

<sup>1</sup> For an overview of the very broad field of religion and film studies, see Chapters 1 and 2 of Melanie J. Wright, *Religion and Film: An Introduction* (London: I. B. Taurus, 2007). As Wright observes, the study of the relationship between religion and film could also focus on "popular" Hollywood films like *The Da Vinci Code* (2006), *Bruce Almighty* (2003) and *The Chronicles of Narnia: The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* (2005).

<sup>2</sup> A recent example is the collection *Faith and Spirituality in Masters of World Cinema*, ed. Kenneth R. Morefield (Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2008). This collection of essays discusses the films of European directors like Ingmar Bergman, Roberto Rossellini, Krzysztof Kieslowski, Robert Bresson, Carl Theodor Dreyer, Andrei Tarkovsky, Eric Rohmer and the Brothers Dardenne in relation to religious or spiritual concerns. While the volume also features an African and a Middle Eastern director, European directors form the dominant group.

<sup>3</sup> For a discussion of the genres of the melodrama and the musical in *Dancer*, see Brenda Austin-Smith, "'Mum's the Word': The Trial of Genre in *Dancer in the Dark*," *Post Script*, 26.1 (2006), 32-42. Austin-Smith sees *Dancer* as a film that posits "[a] contest between the musical and the melodrama" (33).

<sup>4</sup> *Trier on von Trier* ed. Stig Björkman (London: Faber and Faber, 2003), 104.

---

<sup>5</sup> Caroline Bainbridge, *The Cinema of Lars von Trier: Authenticity and Artifice* (London: Wallflower Press, 2007), 87.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

<sup>7</sup> Von Trier himself often enacts gestures to claim membership to the tradition of the European masters. There is, for instance, the provocative but not inapt dedication of *Antichrist* to Tarkovsky. Bainbridge also quotes von Trier as saying: “There have been two Danish directors—Carl Theodor Dreyer and me.” See *The Cinema of Lars von Trier: Authenticity and Artifice*, 14.

<sup>8</sup> In *Dancer*’s parallel film *Breaking the Waves*, the protagonist Bess too is a well-defined Christ-figure. See Linda Mercadante, “Bess the Christ Figure?: Theological Interpretations of *Breaking the Waves*,” *Journal of Religion & Film*, 5.1 (2001).

<sup>9</sup> In her focus on genre, Austin-Smith alternatively reads “Selma’s imagined dance sequence with Novy” in the trial scene as a moment when “the two genres, the musical and the melodrama, meet and briefly exchange identities” (40). Austin-Smith’s point, nevertheless, is that Selma’s reverie is but a short-lived one as the musical genre is subsequently eliminated by the trial’s guilty verdict which further bestows the melodrama genre—and Selma’s doomed role within it—ascendancy.

<sup>10</sup> For example, see Bill Scalia, “Bergman’s Trilogy of Faith, *Persona*, and Faith in Narrative” in *Faith and Spirituality in Masters of World Cinema*.

<sup>11</sup> Irena S. M. Makarushka differs from this view and argues for “an ironic or even cynical” reading of the ending. See “Transgressing Goodness in *Breaking the Waves*,” *Journal of Religion & Film*, 2.1 (1998).

<sup>12</sup> Jane Feuer, *The Hollywood Musical* (Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1993), 84.

<sup>13</sup> Here the religious dimension of von Trier’s film is conveyed not only by its content but by the form and medium of film itself. It is part of the cinematic experience of von Trier’s film as a sensuous musical. This manner of discerning how the religious dimension can be expressed by the film medium itself has been one important strand in religion and film studies. For instance, for Greg Watkins, it is important that a director pays attention to “the nature of the [film] medium and, by extension, what it might mean for an artist to think ‘religiously’ within it.” See “Seeing and Being Seen: Distinctively Filmic and Religious Elements in Film,” *Journal of Religion & Film*, 3.2 (1999). In this light, von Trier’s attempt to film the musical scenes using one hundred cameras to convey a sense of their being “like a live transmission or a live performance” can be interpreted in terms of the film’s religious dimension. Here the musical scenes would convey a sense of heightened, immediate contact with the “divine” realm, reflecting again a concern with expressing the religious via the film medium. For von Trier’s comments on the one hundred cameras experiment, see Lars von Trier, *Dancer in the Dark* (London: FilmFour Books, 2000), vii-viii.

<sup>14</sup> Lars von Trier, *Breaking the Waves* (London: Faber and Faber, 1996), 18.